

Message Text

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TAGS: PINT, SHUM, BL
SUBJ: GOB DECREES GENERAL AMNESTY; HUNGER STRIKE CONTINUES

REF: LA PAZ 0459

1. AFTER A LENGTHY CABINET SESSION, PRESIDENT BANZER ANNOUNCED ON TV ABOUT MIDNIGHT EVENING ON JANUARY17, THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD DECREE A GENERAL POLITICAL AMNESTY, AND THAT IT IS DETERMINED TO PROCEED WITH ITS PLANS TO RETURN BOLIVIA TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT. HE WARNED, HOWEVER, THAT EXISTING LAWS WOULD CONTINUE TO BE ENFORCED AND THAT "THE ENEMIES OF BOLIVIA" WOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO OPERATE WITH IMPUNITY. AT THE END OF HIS MESSAGE, BANZER CALLED FOR A MEETING BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND ALL POLITICAL PARTIES TO ELABORATE AND SIGN A "NATIONAL PACIFICATION AGREEMENT" AIMED AT DEFINING INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY.

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2. MEANWHILE, AT FIVE LOCATIONS AFFILIATED WITH THE CHURCH IN LA PAZ AND IN A NUMBER OF PLACES ELSEWHERE IN BOLIVIA, THE HUNGER STRIKE CONTINUES. WE UNDERSTAND ALSO THAT SOME OF THE STRIKERS FORCIBLY REMOVED FROM THE UNIVERSITY AND THE PRESENCIA BUILDING JANUARY 17 (REFTTEL) HAVE VOWED TO CONTINUE TO FAST IN THE CLINICS AND CELLS WHERE THEY ARE CONFINED. FORMER PRESIDENT LUIS ADOLFO

SILES SALINES, HAS TOLD EMBOFFS THAT THE SITUATION HAS NOW TILTED IN FAVOR OF THE STRIKERS. HE SAID HE WAS ENCOURAGED BY THE BANZER ANNOUNCEMENT, AND BELIEVED AN AGREEMENT MIGHT BE REACHED SHORTLY BUT THE STICKING POINT WAS BANZER'S INSISTENCE ON ENFORCING "EXISTING" LAWS WHICH SILES SAID MIGHT WELL BE APPLIED TO HIMSELF AND THE OTHER STRIKERS. SILES STRESSED THAT THE PERMANENT ASSEMBLY ON HUMAN RIGHTS (PAHR) WAS READY TO END THE STRIKE, AND WOULD INSIST ONLY ON A TONING DOWN OF BANZER'S LANGUAGE AND ASSURANCE THE GOB WILL ABIDE BY ITS PREVIOUS COMMITMENT TO THE STRIKERS.

3. MEANWHILE THE MORNING PRESS JANUARY 18 CARRIES ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE RADIO-PRESS ASSOCIATION THAT NEWSPAPERS AND RADIOS WILL NOT OPERATE NATIONWIDE ON JANUARY 19 IN PROTEST OF POLCIE ENTRY JAN 17 INTO THE NEWSPAPER PRESENCIA, AND THE OFFICE OF THE LA PAZ NEWSPAPER UNION. ALSO CARRIED IS A STATEMENT SIGNED JANUARY 17 BY BISHOP JORGE MANRIQUE THAT IF THE HUNGER STRIKE WERE NOT RESOLVED ON JANUARY 18, THE CHURCH WOULD SUSPEND ADMINISTRATION OF ALL SACRAMENTS, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF LAST RITES, ON JANUARY 20, 21 AND 22 IN THE ARCHDIOCESE OF LA PAZ. MANRIQUE ALSO SAID THAT THE CHURCH RESERVED THE RIGHT TO EXCOMMUNICATE THE PERPETRATORS AND INTELLECTUAL AUTHORS OF THE VIOLATIONS OF CHURCH PROPERTY.

4. COMMENT: BANZER'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF A GENERAL POLITICAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AMNESTY SHOULD GO A LONG WAY TOWARDS CALMING THE SITUATION IN LA PAZ, ASSUMING THAT THE STRIKERS ACCEPT THIS CONCESSION. HIS ANNOUNCEMENT MAY ALSO DIMINSH THE CHURCH AND MEDIA REACTIONS (OBVIOUSLY PLANNED BEFORE BANZER'S SPEECH) TO THE EVENTS OF THE LAST FEW DAYS. WHILE THE REAL MEANING OF THE "GENERAL AMNESTY" IS NOT CLEARLY DEFINED, IT APPEARS TO MEAN THAT THE 348 PERSONS REMAINING IN POLITICAL EXILE WILL BE ALLOWED TO RETURN BUT THAT THEY WILL BE SUBJECT TO PROSECUTION FOR CRIMES WHICH THEY MAY HAVE COMMITTED. WITH REGARD TO THE 132 HUNGER STRIKERS WHICH THE GOVERNMENT DETAINED ON JAN 17 WE BELIEVE THE AMNESTY MEANS THEY WILL BE RELEASED WITHOUT SANCTION. AS FAR AS WE KNOW, HOWEVER, AT THIS MOMENT ALMOST ALL OF THE STRIKERS REMAIN UNDER DETENTION.
BOEKER

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